

Message Text

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PAGE 01 TEL AV 04275 291611Z
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 NEAE-00 CIAE-00 COME-00
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AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
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SUBJ: LAND DAY: A TEST FOR RAKAH

1. SUMMARY: MARCH 30, THE SECOND ANNIVERSARY OF
"LAND DAY," WILL BE MARKED BY MEMORIAL OBSERVANCES.
CALLS FOR A GENERAL STRIKE AND DEMONSTRATIONS HAVE BEEN
OPPOSED BY RAKAH, WHICH FEARS PROVOKING THE AUTHORITIES.
RAKAH, THE VOICE OF ARAB NATIONALISM, IS UNDER PRESSURE
FROM BOTH THE GOI AND INCREASINGLY RADICALIZED ARAB YOUTH.
THE MOLD OF THE ARAB MINORITY IS TENSE IN THE WAKE
OF THE FATAH ATTACK AND THE IDF OCCUPATION OF SOUTH
LEBANON. WHILE BOTH THE TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIP AND
RAKAH WILL SEEK TO PREVENT VIOLENT OUTBREAKS,
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PAGE 02 TEL AV 04275 291611Z

THEY REMAIN A REAL POSSIBILITY. RAKAH'S AUTHORITY
WILL BE TESTED TOMORROW. END SUMMARY

2. MARCH 30 MARKS THE SECOND ANNIVERSARY OF "LAND
DAY," AND ISRAELI ARABS WILL ONCE AGAIN USE THE OCCASION
AS A NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING EXERCISE. THE
DAY ALSO PROVIDES THE OPPORTUNITY FOR THIS INVISIBLE

MINORITY TO REMIND THE ISRAELI AUTHORITIES AND JEWISH PUBLIC OF ITS EXISTENCE AND GRIEVANCES.

3. AT A MEETING IN NAZARETH ON MARCH 3, 300 REPRESENTATIVES OF ARAB ORGANIZATIONS AND MUNICIPALITIES AGREED TO LIMIT ACTIVITY TO MEMORIAL OBSERVANCES FOR THE SIX ISRAELI ARABS KILLED IN DEMONSTRATIONS AGAINST LAND EXPROPRIATION. THE RADICAL "VILLAGE SONS" AND STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS PRESSED FOR A GENERAL STRIKE, WHILE RAKAH PROPOSED NON-PROVOCATIVE, LOW PROFILE ACTIVITY. IN THE END, RAKAH LAID DOWN THE LAW, AND PLANS FOR THREE MEMORIAL ASSEMBLIES IN THE GALILEE, TRIANGLE, AND NEGEV WERE SET.

4. LAND DAY HAS BECOME THE ANNUAL CELEBRATION OF THE HALF MILLION STRONG ARAB COMMUNITY'S NATIONAL AWAKENING, WHICH DATES FROM THE JUNE '67 WAR. RAKAH'S ATTEMPT TO BECOME THE SOLE VOICE AND POLITICAL VEHICLE OF THIS NATIONAL AWAKENING HAS TO A LARGE EXTENT SUCCEEDED (WITH THE UNINTENTIONAL COLLABORATION OF THE GOI, WHICH IMPEDED THE FORMATION AND GROWTH OF NON-COMMUNIST NATIONALIST MOVEMENTS). RECENTLY, RAKAH HAS LOST CONTROL OF SOME OF THE YOUNGER, MORE RADICAL ELEMENTS WHO FAVOR DIRECT ACTION AND INTENSIFIED CONFRONTATIONS WITH ISRAELI AUTHORITIES. RECENT POSTER CAMPAIGNS, RUMORS OF PLANS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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TO ORGANIZE A POLITICAL ORGANIZATION AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO RAKAH, AND THE DEFEAT OF RAKAH SUPPORTERS IN STUDENT COUNCIL ELECTIONS ALL ATTEST TO GROWING ALIENATION OF RADICAL YOUTH FROM RAKAH AND ITS DEVELOPING "UNCLE AHMAD" IMAGE.

5. WHILE RAKAH IS CONCERNED WITH LOSING ITS APPEAL AS THE EXCLUSIVE VOICE OF ARAB NATIONALISM, IT IS CAUGHT IN SOMETHING OF A BIND: UNLIKE THE OTHER RADICAL ORGANIZATIONS, IT IS A LEGAL POLITICAL PARTY WITH REPRESENTATION IN THE KNESSET. AS SUCH, IT HAS SOMETHING TO LOSE. SINCE THE ADVENT OF THE LIKUD GOVERNMENT, TOLERANCE OF RAKAH WITHIN THE KNESSET AND AMONG ARAB AFFAIRS OFFICIALS IN THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE HAS DECLINED. PERIODICALLY -- USUALLY AFTER TERRORIST ATTACKS -- THERE IS TALK OF BANNING THE PARTY (MOST RECENTLY PROPOSED BY MK FLATTO-SHARON). HENCE, RAKAH IS EXTREMELY WARY OF PROVOKING THE AUTHORITIES.

6. RAKAH, IRONICALLY, IS WORKING IN INFORMAL ALLIANCE WITH THE TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIP AND THE SECURITY FORCES TO PREVENT VIOLENT CONFRONTATIONS TOMORROW. THE BORDER

POLICE, WHICH WILL BE DEPLOYED OUTSIDE VILLAGES SO AS NOT TO PROVOKE THE POPULATION, WILL RELY ON RAKAH'S WELL-OILED MACHINE TO PREVENT VIOLENT OUTBREAKS. THE AUTHORITIES REMAIN NERVOUS, HOWEVER, AND ARAB SOURCES REFUSE TO PREDICT WHETHER IN FACT TOMORROW'S EVENTS CAN BE LIMITED TO PASSIVE MEMORIAL OBSERVANCE. THE RECENT TERRORIST INCIDENT AND IDF OCCUPATION (AND ARAB ABANDONMENT) OF SOUTH LEBANON HAVE STIRRED UP THE ARAB POPULATION, HEIGHTENING ITS FEELINGS OF ALIENATION, IMPOTENCE, AND FRUSTRATION. AT THE SAME TIME, ARABS ARE APPREHENSIVE ABOUT A "POLICE RIOT" AND MAY DECLINE TO BE DRAWN INTO A SITUATION WHICH THEY BELIEVE SOME ISRAELI AUTHORITIES WOULD BE EAGER TO EXPLOIT TO CLAMP DOWN ON THE COMMUNITY AS A WHOLE. THESE CONCERNS MAY LEAD TO SUPPRESSION OF THE FEELINGS OF ALIENATION

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PAGE 04 TEL AV 04275 291611Z

AND FRUSTRATION. IN ANY EVENT, THE VERY REAL POSSIBILITY OF A VIOLENT REPETITION OF LAND DAY ONE CONSTITUTES A TEST OF RAKAH'S STRENGTH AND AUTHORITY. LEWIS

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